GERMAN CRITICISM OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL FROM 1800 TO THE PRESENT

BY
EMORY KEITH REES
A.B., University of Illinois, 1937
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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
GERMAN IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
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INTRODUCTION

In spite of the interest which has been consistently manifested in the historical novel—if we except the period of naturalism, when, for patent reasons, the historical novel was in great disrepute—there is as yet no unified or inclusive treatment of the nature and technique of the historical novel, or even a history of the development of this genre. In Germany the recent revival of the historical novel to a popularity and importance unexcelled in any other period has been the occasion for a number of very excellent critical articles on the essential nature of the historical novel and its justification. A brief bibliography of these is given at the end of this abstract. These articles offer valuable contributions to a comprehensive work on the nature and technique of the historical novel, which is, as yet, unwritten. Another extremely valuable contribution to such a work would be a conveniently organized treatment of the views of outstanding critics on the problem of the historical novel.

Ernest Bernbaum, in an article entitled "The Views of the Great Critics on the Historical Novel" in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association* XLI, 424-41, has presented the attitudes of a number of the great critics of the nineteenth century on the historical novel. In tracing the views of these critics, Professor Bernbaum finds that neither Hegel, who would have been best fitted to treat the historical novel philosophically, nor Coleridge, who could have dealt most adequately with its literary qualities, realized what importance this genre was going to assume. The earlier critics of the nineteenth century—Hazlitt, Stendhal, Sainte Beuve—touched upon the historical novel only in a fragmentary way and left nothing which could have been cited in its defense against the unfavorable criticism loosed against it by the positivistic critics—Leslie Stephen, Georg Brandes, Ferdinand Brunetière—who regarded the reproduction of the past in historical novels as an impossible task.

In view of the very extensive cultivation of the historical novel by German authors, it does not appear out of place to investigate the critical repercussions of this popularity, not only among the literary critics proper, but among the literary historians as well, for the evaluations of

the latter group are frequently even more influential than those of the literary critics, since they are more widely read. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to present the views of the leading German literary critics and literary historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the historical novel.

Since the task of the literary historian is to describe and evaluate works of literature in their historical flux, it will be appropriate to base our consideration of the literary historians on their *evaluations* of the historical novel in the various periods of its development. The literary critic, on the other hand, is more concerned with the definition and analysis of literary genres, the investigation of their natures, and the consideration of the technical problems of artistic creation. Therefore, it will be most practical to consider the views of the literary critics on the *basic problems* of the historical novel.

This study is limited to a consideration of critics from the nineteenth century on, because the flowering of the historical novel and the consciousness of it as a distinct literary genre came subsequent to the appearance of the novels of Walter Scott during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The critics selected as the outstanding German literary critics are those discussed by Sigmund Lempicki in his article "Literarische Kritik" in the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte* edited by Paul Merker and Wolfgang Stammler, with the addition of Karl Rosenkranz and Karl Solger, whom Professor Bernbaum mentions as having made outstanding contributions to the subject. Since there is no authoritative treatment of the writing of literary history in the nineteenth century, such as that given by Sigmund Lempicki in his *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft* (1920), which has unfortunately been completed only up to the nineteenth century, the outstanding literary historians have been selected from the list given in Robert F. Arnold's *Allgemeine Bücherkunde zur neueren deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (third edition, 1931).

I. THE FORMULATION OF THE BASIC PROBLEMS

The discussion of the problem of the historical novel falls naturally into two broad divisions, one of them concerned with its nature and definition, while the other deals specifically with the questions of technique involved in the re-creation of the historical past and histori-

cal personages by the novelist. Our definition of the historical novel is that given by M. Nussberger in his article on the historical novel in the *Reallexikon*:

> So nennt man eine umfangreichere, erzählende Dichtung, die sich um beglaubigte geschichtliche Persönlichkeiten oder Tatsachen dreht. Doch kann auch bloss der Hintergrund als genauer begrenzter Zeitabschnitt geschildert und als solcher kenntlich gemacht sein.

The distinction between the novel in general and the historical novel is not so obvious as it would seem at first sight. Every novelist selects a more or less clearly defined time and place for his novel, and thereby introduces an element of definiteness not essentially different from that of the historical novel. This has been pointed out very clearly by R. Koskimies in his *Theorie des Romans* (1935, pp. 102-103):

> Der sogenannte historische Roman unterscheidet sich von den übrigen Romantypen nur dadurch, dass in seinem Gehalt jene Genauigkeit so weit entwickelt ist, wie die künstlerisch sich entfaltende Erzählung es überhaupt zulässt.

An essential element in the historical novel, however, is that the historical novelist has the perspective afforded by the passage of time and the considered judgment of scholars; in this element lies the real distinction between the *Zeitroman,* which deals with subject matter which later becomes historical, and the historical novel proper.

Disputes over the justification of the historical novel usually rage most furiously around the question of the possibility of fusing history and fiction. The question has been a moot one because of the fear, only too often justified by actual examples, that either the facts of history will be falsified or the creative freedom of the author will be fettered. This problem has arisen, both in theory and practice, because of the failure to realize that history means something vastly different to the historian than to the artist. To the former, history presents a body of factual material which he is obliged to take over as a whole, to organize, and to explain. To the latter, on the other hand, history presents a body of factual material from which he selects such motifs as will help to build up an artistic whole, and ignores whatever, in his judgment, is unnecessary or detrimental to the aesthetic effects he is trying to produce. Seen in this light it becomes obvious that we need not require the historical novelist to do that which is properly the task of the historian. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the novelist was free to

invent his characters, plot, and setting. If he gives up this freedom, then he is bound to respect the real existence of the historical personages or events which he selects. If his work is to lay just claim to both the terms 'historical' and 'novel,' there must be a synthesis of history and fiction into a new whole.

If the basic problem of the historical novel is to achieve a synthesis between the stubborn facts of history and the free play of the creative imagination, what are the technical means by which this synthesis may be brought about? In choosing to use historical material, the novelist has set up a claim that his reader will expect and demand that he fulfill. If a novel claims to have seventeenth century setting, for example, the reader will be dissatisfied unless the novel impresses him as a real and authentic picture of that time. The historical novelist must, therefore, seek out technical means which heighten the impression of reality and avoid whatever tends to break down the illusion.

The most difficult and most important phase of the problem of creating an impression of reality in the historical novel is that of relating the characters to their setting in an organic way. If a novel is to be historical in the true sense, then the characters and setting must form an organic whole. The reader must be able to feel that the characters act as creatures of their own age and not of his: that they have developed out of the historical setting in which the author has placed them, and not that they are merely set up in front of a painted drop. It is essential, therefore, that the author avoid anachronisms, not only the easily avoided external ones, but even more the anachronisms of character and thought which are so difficult to detect. Moreover, the author should be objective, not intruding his own reflections constantly, or introducing comparisons with modern times. This has been carried so far by Adalbert Stifter, that in his *Witiko* he makes the speeches and conversations of the characters the only means of characterization and exposition. E. G. Kolbenheyer goes even further, insisting that the language of the historical novel must be philologically authentic. His *Paracelsus* and *Meister Joachim Pausewang* are written in the language of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN GERMAN LITERATURE

Before we proceed to discuss the evaluation of the historical novel and the criticism of its problems, it will be necessary to have in mind a clear idea of the essential trends in its development. The development of the historical novel in Germany during the nineteenth century has been traced by M. Nussberger in the article in *Reallexikon* already cited, and by Hellmuth Mielke and Hans Joachim Homann in *Der deutsche Roman des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts.* Neither of these, however, treats the earlier development of the German historical novel independently of Scott. Nussberger's article is confined entirely to the nineteenth century, since it ends with Fontane, and the discussion by Mielke and Homann does not point out the full significance of the twentieth century revival of the historical novel. Richard du Moulin Eckart's brochure *Der historische Roman in Deutschland und seine Entwicklung.* was published in 1905 and perforce deals only with the nineteenth century. Walther Rehm's *Geschichte des deutschen Romans* (1927), while very brief, offers the most helpful treatment of the twentieth century historical novel. The brief sketch given in this study begins with the baroque novel and extends down to the present. It is indebted to the above named works, but is based as much as possible also on the reading of the original novels.

Although the novels of the seventeenth century have usually been considered pseudohistorical, they introduce into German literature a new element which justifies us in considering them the first historical novels: they drew consciously upon history as a branch of learning and were very diligent in searching out their source materials, while their predecessors had all drawn from the whole mass of tradition and legend indiscriminately. Karl Leo Cholevius, who wrote the authoritative work on the German novel of the seventeenth century, *Die bedeutendsten deutschen Romane des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1866), does not hesitate to call these novels historical, and traces their source material in some detail. The historical novel could come into existence only when history as a definite branch of learning had become established (this is implied in the very adjective 'historical'), and furthermore, only after the possibility of presenting historical facts in the form of fiction had been thought of. These two conditions are certainly fulfilled by the

novels of Zesen, Ziegler, Bucholtz, Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig, and Lohenstein.

However, the historical novel in German literature did not develop from these early historical novels, although Wieland, whose Greek novels were the first to be based upon historical studies comparable to those of modern historical novelists, may have been influenced by them.

With the rise of the romantic movement in Germany, interest in the national and historical, which had waned during the internationalistic, unhistorical Age of Enlightenment, was again awakened, and for the third time the historical novel put forth a tentative blossom in Germany. Although it was soon crowded out by the sudden and luxuriant growth engendered by Scott, it added richness to the soil in which the historical novel, with occasional setbacks, has continued to flourish. The main historical novelists of romanticism were Fouqué, Kleist, Arnim, and Tieck. Foqué idealizes the *Ritterromane*—the past is for him simply a romantic field for the imagination, unconcerned with historical accuracy. Both Kleist and Arnim place their characters in a real historical period, that of the German Reformation, which they present vividly and on the whole realistically, although many of the characters and events in *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Die Kronenwächter* are as fantastic as a fairy tale. Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* is the greatest historical novelette, and Arnim's *Kronenwächter* is the greatest historical novel produced in Germany before the influence of Scott began to be felt. Tieck, in his later realistic period under the influence of Scott, wrote several historical novelettes which eliminate to a large extent the fantastic, typically romantic elements of Fouqué, Kleist, and Arnim. The most important ones are his *Aufruhr in den Cevennen* (unfinished) and *Vittoria Accorombona,* the best portrayal of the Italian Renaissance before C. F. Meyer.

Although there were many immediate followers of Scott in Germany, most of them have been forgotten. The best novel in the style of Scott was Hauff's *Lichtenstein.* Willibald Alexis at first wrote imitations of Scott, but later turned to Prussian history and wrote a cycle of historical novels of high merit and originality. His historical genre pictures are unusually vivid, and their reality is heightened by his ability to capture and present the spirit of the North German landscape at all seasons. His characters are realistic and attractive, but his great weakness lies in his inability to weld the splendidly presented individual parts into a unified and harmonious whole. In his best novel, *Die Hosen*

des Herrn von Bredow (1846), he succeeded in solving this problem by making a pair of leather breeches the center of the story in a most unusual fashion. Here humor and tragedy, the serious and the whimsical, unite in presenting an unusually vivid and charming story from the early history of the Mark Brandenburg.

The ability to create a unified whole and to preserve consistently the view point of a former historical epoch, which Alexis lacked, is manifested in the work of a little-known author: *Maria Schwindler, die Bernsteinhexe* (1843) by Wilhelm Meinhold. Meinhold pretended that it was an old church chronicle discovered by him and put into shape for publication. He endeavored to cast it into the language of the seventeenth century and succeeded to a degree which makes him a significant predecessor of Kolbenheyer.

The historical novel enjoyed increasing popularity from 1850 to about 1880. The novelists most popular at the time—Luise Mühlbach, Georg Ebers, Felix Dahn, and numerous others—are practically forgotten today. During this period the emphasis was on the presentation of external culture, while anachronisms of spirit and character were often tolerated. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl was one of the best of the distinctively "cultural" historical novelists. On an artistically higher level was Joseph Victor Scheffel's *Ekkehard,* a novel of the tenth century, woven together after much reading of chronicles, which is still read with interest and pleasure today. Gustav Freytag, whose cultural history of Germany, *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit,* is still considered one of the best, wrote a cycle of novels from various periods of German history called *Die Ahnen.* Wilhelm Raabe's earlier novels were historical and patriotic. The two greatest historical novelists of the nineteenth century, however, were Adalbert Stifter and C. F. Meyer.

Stifter's novels have only lately come to be estimated at their true worth, and *Witiko,* a vivid re-creation of Bohemia in the twelfth century, in particular, has been disregarded until recently. Stifter was unusually successful in making his characters grow out of the historical setting in an organic way, a success due in part to the high degree of objectivity which he observed, because he felt that history, like nature, was the creation of God, and therefore not to be tampered with by the novelist. We have already noticed the unique use which Stifter makes of conversation and speeches in characterization and exposition. This aspect of Stifter has been treated by H. G. Barnes in an essay, "The Function

of Conversation and Speeches in 'Witiko' ", in *German Studies Presented to H. G. Fiedler* (1938).

Conrad Ferdinand Meyer is undoubtedly the greatest historical novelist in Germany in the nineteenth century, if we may broaden the term to include the novelette. Like Scott, he was steeped in history, so that he writes easily and naturally and accurately, without display of erudition. Meyer did not portray historical personages as merely reflected in the lives of fictional characters, but made them central figures. *Der Heilige* in particular is an outstanding example of the possibilities for the exercise of the author's creative ability in characterizing the inner development of historical personages and motivating historical events psychologically—in this case the strange transformation of Thomas à Becket from worldly courtier into ascetic churchman.

With the coming of naturalism, the popularity of the historical novel went into a marked decline. Theodor Fontane was the only naturalistic novelist in Germany who wrote historical novels, and these really belong to his earlier, pre-naturalistic period. In his greatest historical novel, *Vor dem Sturm,* Fontane gives a very vivid cultural picture of the period just before the Wars of Liberation and the stirring of national spirit at that time.

After Fontane we find no other outstanding historical novelist during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. After a period of more than fifty years of consistent popularity, the historical novel virtually vanished from the scene, and naturalistic critics looked with disdain upon the historical novels which had once been so popular. With the rise of literary movements in opposition to naturalism, however, there began a renascence of the historical novel. Although a number of historical novels were published in the decade from 1905-15, the two outstanding figures were Ricarda Huch and E. G. Kolbenheyer. After some earlier novels dealing with Italian history, Ricarda Huch turned to the field of German history for *Der grosse Krieg in Deutschland* (1912-14), a mosaic of scenes from the Thirty Years War, rather than a novel in the conventional sense, which, by the crowd of characters and scenes presented, makes this period, with all its turmoil, live again. Ricarda Huch makes little use of direct narration; like Stifter, she uses the conversation of the characters for exposition and characterization, with the interesting difference, however, that in *Der grosse Krieg,* almost everything is pre-

sented in indirect discourse, and direct quotations are used only rarely, whereas Stifter used direct discourse almost exclusively.

The most outstanding figure in the recent renascence of the historical novel in Germany is Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer. His *Amor Dei,* a novel on the life of Spinoza, already shows Kolbenheyer's remarkable ability to grasp the spirit of an entire historical period in such a way that the historical setting is not merely a painted scene, but an organic whole from which the figure of Spinoza grows. In the trilogy *Parcelsus,* Kolbenheyer turned to national history, choosing one of the most important periods of German history, that of the Reformation, and centering it around one of the most powerful and interesting personalities of the time who becomes in Kolbenheyer's mind the representative German of all times. *Paracelsus* is an excellent example of one of the most characteristic trends of the recent historical novel in German literature: interest in history, not from the point of view of satisfying the curiosity of modern men as to the culture of the past or indulging the love for the exotic and romantic, but interest in history in order to learn how to face the problems of the modern world. Another important feature of Kolbenheyer's historical novels, his attempt to use philologically accurate language rather than conventional archaisms, has already been touched upon.

Since the revival of the historical novel by Ricarda Huch and Kolbenheyer, it has continued to grow in popularity, particularly since the World War, to such an extent that it would be quite impossible to treat even the more important authors in detail. Simply to list some contemporary authors who have written historical novels indicates the scope and popularity of the revived historical novel. We may mention, among others, Walter von Molo, Alfred Neumann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, Hermann Löns, Ina Seidel, Josef Ponten, Werner Beumelburg, Alfred Döblin, Eduard Stucken, Hans Grimm, Benno von Mechow, Max Brod, Jakob Schaffner, Otto Gmelin, Bruno Franck, Friedrich Griese, Hans Friedrich Blunck, to show that authors of all grades of ability and shades of political opinion have cultivated the historical novel. It will be interesting to watch the future and see whether the contemporary renascence of the historical novel, which began around 1905, will continue to produce new developments or whether it has run its course and will give away to some new movement. At the moment, however, the flood of historical novels manifests no tendency to recede.

III. THE EVALUATION OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL BY LITERARY HISTORIANS

The historical novel is not merely a literary genre, concerning whose nature and technique we may generalize; it has also a chronological development within the stream of literature. Since it is the function of the literary historian to present and evaluate the works of literature in their chronological development, a section on the attitudes of literary historians towards the historical novel must form an integral part of a study of the criticism of the historical novel during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As was pointed out in the introduction, the literary historians have been selected from those listed in Arnold's *Allgemeine Bücherkunde*. They have been grouped under the following headings:

1) The Earliest Modern Literary Historians
2) Literary Historians Previous to Wilhelm Scherer
3) Wilhelm Scherer and his School
4) New Currents in Literary History

1) The tremendous importance of Walter Scott for the German historical novel is reflected by even the earliest modern literary historians in Germany. Scott introduced into the historical novel a consistent realism, and this realistic aspect of Scott's novels found ready acceptance in Germany during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. August Koberstein, the father of modern German literary history, points out the importance of the historical novel, as practiced by Scott and Tieck, in the rising movement away from romanticism and toward an objective presentation of real life, whether in the present or in the past. G. G. Gervinus, for whom literary history formed an integral part of German history as a whole, welcomed the overcoming of romanticism by the realistic historical novel. For him it was an indication that Germany was turning from its preoccupation with philosophy and romantic art to the vital questions of the day. The importance of the historical novel in the realistic movement continued to be pointed out by almost every subsequent literary historian. A. F. C. Vilmar, professor of theology and earliest literary historian in a popular style, however, scarcely considered the historical novel, since he did not share the predisposition of Gervinus for the immediate and actual. The fact that he praised the historical novelist who was least realistic and least typical of the later development

of the historical novel—Fouqué—, and ignored the outstanding realistic qualities of Arnim's *Kronenwächter,* seems to indicate that he had little understanding and sympathy for the historical novel.

The historical novel was still too new a genre to receive more than brief attention from the three earliest literary historians whom we have just considered. The great popularity of the historical novel after 1850 naturally found reflection in the literary histories. Joseph Hillebrand's realization of the importance of the genre is indicated by the fact that he devotes more space to a consideration of historical novelists; however, he does not go beyond that which had already been pointed out by Koberstein and Gervinus. Heinrich Kurz treats the nineteenth century rather arbitrarily—Alexis is omitted but Gerstäcker and Sealsfield are included. Since Alexis is omitted a discussion of the historical novel is scarcely to be expected, and as a matter of fact, there are only a few incidental references to the genre. Karl Leo Cholevius, the author of the authoritative work on the novel of the seventeenth century, in his *Geschichte der deutschen Poesie nach ihren antiken Elementen* (1854) is concerned with tracing classical influences on German literature, a point of view which naturally virtually excludes the historical novel with its national sources.

2) Rudolf von Gottschall, Adolf Stern, and Karl Rehorn, however, discuss the historical novel at length, and Felix Bobertag, who was the first to write a history of the German novel, at least seriously considers whether or not to call the novels of the seventeenth century historical, although he finally decides that they are not. Gottschall and Stern, in spite of their rather full treatment of the historical novel, admit the historical novel only under certain conditions. Gottschall felt that the novel should be concerned with the present, and he requires, therefore, that it be national, or that it have some direct connection with the interests of the present. Stern criticizes the type of historical novel which is concerned with imparting cultural information, and gives the seventeenth century novel and the *Professorenroman* as examples of this undesirable tendency. Rehorn's ideal of the historical novel is the cultural novel as it culminates in Freytag's *Ahnen.* He requires of the historical novel that it be national and that it present the past realistically and accurately. All four of these literary historians manifest their interest in the historical novel, not only by according it fuller treatment, but

also by setting up the various conditions under which they consider the historical novel justifiable.

3) The leading positivistic literary historians are Wilhelm Scherer and Friedrich Vogt and Max Koch, his last outstanding followers. They are distinguished by their very brief treatment of the historical novel—Scherer devotes to it only a little over a page, in his rather lengthy history of German literature, which, to be sure, ends with the death of Goethe, and Vogt and Koch, aside from separate discussions of Tieck, Scheffel, and C. F. Meyer, offer very little more. In this, rather than in any direct criticism of the historical novel, is reflected the positivistic point of view, in its preoccupation with achieving the utmost realism in the presentation of the immediate world, and its skepticism concerning the possibility of being able to present the past with any comparable degree of accuracy. Eduard Engel and Alfred Biese follow this tendency of Scherer and Vogt and Kock rather closely. Adolf Bartels, on the other hand, treats the historical novel much more fully, for although he was indebted to positivism methodologically, he had broken away from it in spirit. In his own novel, *Die Dithmarscher,* he combined the historical novel with the tendencies of *Heimatkunst.* Only Martin Schian, of the literary historians with a positivistic tendency, recognized that the historical novel represented a definite realistic tendency, which simply sought its realism in the world of the past, rather than in the immediate present.

In more recent German literary history there have been many departures from the so-called 'positivistic' method of Scherer. For instance, Friedrich Kummer views German literary history as divided into generations; Josef Nadler has evolved a brilliant theory of German literature on the basis of *Stammeskunde;* Oskar Walzel, a representative of literary history as *Geisteswissenschaft,* is at the same time the chief proponent of literature as *Wortkunstwerk.* A convenient bibliography of recent German attempts to find a substitute for Scherer is given by J. T. Geissendoerfer in "A Critical Bibliography of Recent Methods in German Literary Research," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* XXIX, 390-419. To some of these recent literary historians we now turn.

Friedrich Kummer, who, as we have noticed, divided literary history into groups according to generations, and Anselm Salzer, the most outstanding Catholic literary historian, contribute nothing new to the evaluation of the historical novel. Josef Nadler, however, re-evaluates *Witiko* as the great historical novel which it is. Nadler points out the

unique significance which history had for Stifter: it was a part of the divine creation, just as much as the natural world, and just as the natural scientist accepts the facts of nature as they are, so Stifter felt himself obligated to accept the facts of history as given without alteration. Hans Heinrich Borcherdt's *Geschichte des Romans und der Novelle in Deutschland* (1920) is completed only up to Wieland. It is important, however, because it contains the most intelligent discussion of the baroque novel in its relation to history which has been written. Borcherdt asserts that the baroque novel must be considered as historical, from the seventeenth century point of view, because it makes history a mirror of the ethical world and the duty of man, even though its treatment of history may not be so accurate as that of modern historians or historical novelists. Hellmuth Mielke and Hans Joachim Homann are distinguished mainly because they offer the fullest and clearest sketch of the development of the historical novel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in their history of the German novel. Walter Rehm's *Geschichte des deutschen Romans* (1927) is the first complete history of the German novel. Rehm's most outstanding contribution to the evaluation of the historical novel is his treatment of the recent development of this genre in Germany. He points out the very close parallel between the baroque novel and the recent historical novel, in that both delight in great historical personages, and both seek in the past a mirror of the moral world as a guide for present action. In Rehm, and in Oskar Walzel, we find for the first time a realization of the importance of the twentieth century historical novel and a sympathetic interpretation of its nature and purpose. Oskar Walzel points out very clearly the difference between the historical novel of the nineteenth century, which, specially toward the end of the century, sought to bring great historical characters down to a bourgeois level, and the recent historical novel which seeks guidance for the difficult tasks of the present, by portraying the way these problems have been met in the past.

IV. THE VIEWS OF THE LITERARY CRITICS ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

In real life the literary critic precedes the literary historian, for he is a part of the stream of literature and an important factor in directing its immediate course. Later comes the literary historian, who looks at

the historical flux of literature from the perspective of an observer and evaluates the work of both the artist and the critic. This strictly natural order has been departed from in the present study for the sake of clearness in presentation. The comments of the critics on the historical novel, which are frequently fragmentary and incidental, need the more complete and continuous background given by the literary historians in order that they may be brought into clearer relief. For that reason a section on the development of the historical novel and one on the evaluation of the historical novel by literary historians were interpolated between the formulation of the problems of the historical novel and the consideration of the views of literary critics on them.

As indicated in the introduction, the present section of this study treats the literary critics listed by Lempicki in the article entitled "Literarische Kritik" in the *Reallexikon*. Lempicki divides the development of literary criticism in Germany into seven periods:

1) Die Kritik im Mittelalter
2) Die Anfänge der Entwicklung der literarischen Kritik
3) Die Begründung der literarischen Kritik
4) Die fruchtbare Kritik
5) Die romantische Kritik
6) Die Kritik im Dienste des Zeitgeistes
7) Vom Realismus zum Expressionismus

Of these seven periods, only the last three, including, however, more than forty critics, fall within the limits of the present study, since the other four are all previous to the nineteenth century.

To the romantic critics, interested in history primarily for its color rather than its realism, and emphasizing the ego of the author, belongs Friedrich Schlegel. Although he did not have the historical novel directly in view, since this genre had not yet come to prominence in German literature, he must be considered the most important of the early nineteenth century critics, for he was the first to bring the basic problem of the relationship of historical materials to art clearly into view, and to emphasize it as one of the most fundamental problems of aesthetics. His solution of the problem, naturally, was dominated by his romantic orientation: the best way to present the real world of the present is indirectly in the past, where everything assumes a more majestic profile,

and the author has greater freedom for the presentation of himself and his philosophy of life.

The parallels between Friedrich Schlegel's conception of history in literature and that of Eichendorff are very striking. Like Schlegel, Eichendorff was a romanticist, who felt that the eternal and the universal, although it was reflected to a certain degree in the immediate present, would, nevertheless, find its purest incorporation in the past, where prosaic details fade away. Eichendorff, a devout Catholic, saw in history an added significance which it did not hold for Schlegel; although the latter became a Catholic in 1808, four years before the writing of his *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur,* his conception of history does not seem to have been changed. For Eichendorff, history was the expression of God's creative activity and not a fortuitous concatenation of events. With such a lofty conception of history, it is not surprising that the historical novel which Eichendorff knew seemed to him to be the peddler of history. It is to be regretted that Eichendorff did not live to see his ideal of history embodied in the great historical novel *Witkio.* It may be assumed that he would have recognized its greatness, which other contemporaries did not, since he was really the first writer of importance who recognized the significance of Stifter.

Joseph von Görres and Adam Müller ignored the historical novel, which was a very minor genre in their day. August Wilhelm Schlegel's comments on it are rather uncertain, for he seems never to have formulated a basic conception of the relationship of history and fiction. Ludwig Tieck, himself a writer of historical novelettes in his later realistic period, had the historical novel clearly in view. He was an admirer of Scott's narrative ability, but felt that the latter lacked just a little of being a really great writer, although he never states specifically wherein this lack lay. In his criticism of the fantastic elements in *Michael Kohlhaas,* he is important as the first German critic to realize the importance of realistic and accurate local color.

Of the critics in the service of *Zeittendenz,* only Wolfgang Menzel and Heinrich Heine, Karl Solger and Karl Rosenkranz are of primary importance for the historical novel. It was Menzel, outstanding as critic and literary historian, who first emphasized the importance of making the characters in a historical novel grow organically from the historical setting—a requirement which has been increasingly realized in practice by historical novelists. Heine touches only incidentally on the problems

of the historical novel; he is distinguished mainly for his appreciative comments on Scott. The great aesthetician Solger, like Friedrich Schlegel and Eichendorff, emphasizes the significance of history as the embodiment of universal ideas of human life and destiny. Unlike Schlegel, however, he insists on the integrity of historical events and persons; for him the author is no longer supreme to deal with the historical subject matter according to the dictates of his ego. Rosenkranz treats the problem of anachronisms from a Hegelian point of view. For Hegel, the rational basis of the universe was surmised in the beauty of art, felt in religion, and known in philosophy. Accordingly in his discussion of the ugly (*Aesthetik des Hässlichen,* 1853), he finds that it consists in three sorts of departure from the rational: formlessness, incorrectness, and disfiguration. Anachronisms are considered under the heading of historical-conventional incorrectness. Rosenkranz advocates allowing the author considerable liberty, for he believes that the universal human element in history is separable from externalities. In this he is in direct contrast to Solger, who had argued that the universal could be attained only by strict preservation of the particular.

A whole list of critics belonging to *Jungdeutschland,* Börne, Wienbarg, Laube, Mundt, Kühne, and Gutzkow, as well as a number of other critics of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Varnhagen von Ense, Arnold Ruge, Hermann Marggraff, and Alexander Jung, either did not discuss the historical novel at all, or added nothing new to our understanding of it.

The final period, from realism to expressionism, includes about thirty critics of very different tendencies. Most of them fall into the four groups of realistic, naturalistic, anti-naturalistic, and expressionistic critics, with a few transitional figures, and one or two, such as Nietzsche, standing outside these main currents. Of the critics of the realistic third quarter of the nineteenth century, Hermann Hettner and Julian Schmidt are outstanding. Hettner was one of the earliest to outline a program of poetic realism in his critique of romanticism, *Die romantische Schule* (1850). In *Das moderne Drama* (1852), he formulates the basic problem of the use of historical matter in literature more clearly than any other critic considered in this study. From his formulation of the problem he is able to derive a particularly clear-cut solution, which he applies not only to the historical drama, with which he is mainly concerned, but also to the historical novel. Hettner asserts that the author should

choose historical subject matter only if it is more suitable for his purpose than anything he could invent. Therefore, he defeats his own purpose, if he immediately begins to modify the given historical events or persons arbitrarily.

Julian Schmidt is not the critic with a bold, fundamental thesis like that of Hettner. He makes detailed, appreciative criticisms of Scott and Alexis. Although he points out their weaknesses, he nevertheless emphasizes primarily their good qualities. Furthermore, he defends the historical novel from its critics, by pointing out that the historical novelist, by his re-creation of the past, does better that which every reader of history must do in order to visualize what he reads.

The other two chief realistic critics, Robert Prutz and Ferdinand Kürnberger, are more superficial in their comments on the historical novel than either Hettner or Julian Schmidt. Prutz welcomes the historical novel as an essentially new genre, which is the most happy expression of the new realistic tendencies in German literature. Kürnberger praises Hermann Kurz's *Schillers Heimatjahre* very highly, but makes no comment that contributes any new angles to the evaluation of the historical novel as such. Paul Lindau and Karl Frenzel are representatives of a stagnant period in criticism between realism and the first forerunners of naturalism. They were highly influential, but their criticisms lacked the vitality to lift them above the level of ordinary convention. Both Lindau and Frenzel defended the archaeological historical novel, the latter especially against the attacks of the naturalists.

With the rise of naturalism, as we have already seen, the historical novel declined tremendously in popularity, both with the critics and with the public. As a result, the period of criticism which we are now to consider is very meagre in its comments on the historical novel. Even those who stood outside the actual naturalistic movement, as well as the expressionistic critics who followed, have little to say on this genre. The naturalistic critics proper, of course, emphasized the presentation of the life immediately about them, partly in connection with their preeminently social orientation, and partly because they believed that the function of the artist was to give a 'slice of life', and this could be done much more easily with the present than with the historical past, if indeed, the task was possible at all. Thus while one may welcome the naturalistic critics and their forerunners as a new and invigorating force in German criticism as a whole, for the historical novel, on the

other hand, this is a period of virtual stagnation, with only a few redeeming exceptions.

Around 1880 there began to be stirrings against the *Epigonentum* which became characteristic of German literature after the Franco- Prussian War. Julius and Heinrich Hart, in their *Kritische Waffengänge,* dared to believe in the future of German literature, criticized subjectivism in criticism, and demanded that the critic give proof for his assertions. Friedrich Nietzsche likewise made scathing attacks on the stagnant condition of literature at that time, while Leo Berg asked, "Haben wir überhaupt noch eine Literatur?" Zola began to be influential in Germany at this time; the brothers Hart, while they did not join those who criticized Zola on moral grounds, nevertheless criticized his theoretical presuppositions and warned against following him. Friedrich Mauthner likewise felt that it was a mistake to urge Zola as a model for German literature. It is to these transitional figures that we now turn our attention.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period in which the historical novel was at a low ebb. Most of the critics, not only the naturalists, but later critics as well, manifested a decided coolness toward the historical novel. This was due, in part, to the fact that the historical novel which they had mainly in mind—the *Professorenroman*—had little vitality and artistic worth. This coolness was already characteristic of Heinrich and Julius Hart, who criticized the *Professorenroman* severely. They found nowhere, except in the Greek novelettes of Oskar Linke, that which they required of the historical novelist: the presentation of past epochs in such a way that the reader is no longer conscious of the difference between that age and his own, and that he undergoes universal human experiences with the characters of the former age. Friedrich Mauthner is likewise a critic of the *Professorenroman;* he finds only Scheffel's *Ekkehard,* of all the German historical novels, comparable to those of Scott, because in it the artist triumphs over the scholar. Friedrich Nietzsche makes no comment on the historical novel, even in his attacks on the low level of German literature in his day. It is surprising that Nietzsche, who valued Stifter's *Nachsommer* so highly, should not have commented on his great historical novel *Witiko.* However *Witiko* was virtually unknown to contemporaries, and was unavailable for many years in the book trade. Leo Berg emphasizes the difficulty of avoiding psychological anachronisms. He finds that even the use of modern language constitutes a serious anachronism, because of the different associa-

tions which the words have acquired in the course of centuries. This difficulty does not cause him to wholly condemn the historical novel, however. Its justification, nevertheless, must be sought, not in the subject matter, but in the purpose for which the author uses the given subject matter.

Leo Berg is a transitional figure. Of the naturalistic critics themselves, three, M. G. Conrad, Arno Holz, and Paul Schlenther, have nothing to say on the historical novel. Karl Bleibtreu and Otto Brahm, however, emphasize important aspects of the problem of this benre. Bleibtreu objects to the purely cultural type of historical novel, with petty, fictional characters, and urges that this genre has significance only if it deals with great historical personages. Brahm praises C. F. Meyer, who avoids the two pitfalls of the historical novel: that of extreme erudition on the one hand, and that of presenting material so exotic that it does not have enough connection to the present to arouse the sympathy of the reader, on the other hand. It appears that the German naturalistic critics, when they were not completely indifferent to the historical novel, as Conrad, Holz, and Schlenther were, did not make such a sweeping condemnation of it as did Leslie Stephen, Ferdinand Brunetière, and Georg Brandes. Otto Brahm and Karl Bleibtreu both criticize, more by implication than directly, the *Professorenroman,* which in popular esteems represented the acme of the historical novel, but Brahm is able to recognize the good qualities of the historical novels of Freytag, Scheffel, and C. F. Meyer, while Karl Bleibtreu makes a very convincing plea for the right of the historical novelist to use great historical personages, probably with Meyer as an example, although Bleibtreu does not mention him.

The post-naturalistic critics, for the most part, continued to be indifferent toward the historical novel. Alfred Kerr, Friedrich Lienhard, Otto Stoessl, and Wilhelm von Scholz, as well as the expressionistic critics Kasimir Edschmid and Bernhard Diebold, have nothing to say on the historical novel. Ludwig Speidel calls it the lowest form of fiction. Hermann Bahr, the Austrian critic, is one of the first to plead for a reevaluation of *Witiko,* but he adds nothing to a consideration of the theory of the historical novel. Paul Ernst writes an appreciative essay on the too little-known Wilhelm Meinhold, but as the leading proponent of neoclassicism, Ernst's interest is obviously in Meinhold's *Bernsteinhexe* as a model of form, rather than a historical novel.

Of all the critics around 1900, only Samuel Lublinski realized the significance of the revival of the historical novel at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a surprisingly far-sighted way he anticipated that the newer historical novel would no longer emphasize culture for the sake of information, but would seek in history guidance for the present—a prediction which has been fully realized in the novels of Kolbenheyer and others.

CONCLUSION

The historical novel has long been one of the most disputed of literary genres. It has been both assailed and defended vehemently by critics. In the course of this study we have had opportunity to examine what German literary historians and critics have had to say on this difficult form of art, and despite some negative voices, it is clear that the verdict is fundamentally in favor of the significant use of historical subject matter in the novel. When all is said and done, the worst enemies and the most powerful defenders of the historical novel have been the historical novelists, mediocre and great, and if the historical novel has received rather meager critical treatment in Germany, the reason is not far to seek: the number of really outstanding historical novels in German literature is not very great, while floods of second and third-rate historical novels have tended to prejudice the attitude of critics toward the genre as a whole.

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